

Fred Leuchter's "Indiscretion"

[Joseph P. Bellinger](#)

At the present time, there are no "Holocaust denial" laws in the United States of America, although attempts have been repeatedly made behind the scenes by Jewish organizations and individuals to try and penalize "deniers" by various means. When one ventures into the arena of "Holocaust denial," unpleasant consequences invariably ensue.

Against those whose opinions and evidence challenge the conclusions of mainstream historians, smear, electronic harassment, loss of employment, denunciations to employers, character assassination and poison pen letters are the usual methods employed by determined groups and individuals seeking to squelch free speech and open debate. In some rare cases, outright violence has been used in an attempt to put "deniers" out of business.

For example, on July 4, 1984, arsonists set fire to the warehouse of the Institute for Historical Review, resulting in an estimated \$400,000 worth of damage. [\[1\]](#) The suspected arsonists were former members of the Jewish Defense League, whose leader at the time, Irv Rubin, was later arrested and accused of conspiring to bomb a Los Angeles mosque in December 2001. The 56-year-old Rubin and his associate, 59-year-old Earl Kugel, were subsequently arrested and arraigned on a charge of conspiracy to bomb private and government property. In November 2002, Rubin, who was said to be despondent and terrified over the prospect of an upcoming trial, allegedly committed suicide by slitting his own throat and plummeting off a twenty-foot balcony in the Los Angeles County jail. His accomplice, Earl Kugel, pled guilty and was sentenced to twenty years' imprisonment in a federal prison, where he was subsequently killed by a fellow inmate.



Fred A. Leuchter author of four technical reports on the "gas chambers" of World War II standing in front of "Old Smokey" the electric chair of the Tennessee state prison at Nashville. Photo taken at the National Museum of Crime and Punishment in Washington D.C., May, 2008.

Revisionists in the United States and Canada have in fact been subjected to a multiplicity of various underhanded stratagems designed to discourage them from publicizing or otherwise disseminating their beliefs and bring them into public contempt. Although to date no Senate or House Committee has been formed to address the issue of "Holocaust denial," the harassment of revisionists recalls to mind an unpleasant form of intolerance usually associated with the McCarthy Era, when blacklisted communists and communist sympathizers were the subject of publicly aired House and Senate investigations.

Perhaps the most pronounced example of such pressure tactics in America concerns the case of Fred Leuchter, whose personal life and professional career were shattered as a result of his fateful forensic examination of Auschwitz and Majdanek in February 1988.

Leuchter's ordeal began in January 1988, when he was contacted by members of Ernst Zündel's defense team. In an effort to prepare the best possible defense for Zündel, who was charged with disseminating 'false news' in Canada, Robert Faurisson reasoned that the most obvious place to look for a qualified witness on the operation of homicidal gas chambers would be the United States, where condemned criminals were still subject in a number of states to execution in gas chambers.

Attorneys for Zündel thereafter contacted various prison officials in the United States in the hope of enlisting an expert's testimony on the operation of homicidal gas chambers. William M. Armontrout, Warden at the Missouri State Penitentiary, replied to their letter of enquiry on January 13, 1988, recommending Fred A. Leuchter as the most qualified expert in this field. In this letter, Armontrout stated,

"I have considerable knowledge in that area, however, I suggest you contact Mr. Fred A. Luechter [sic]. [...] Mr. Luechter [sic] is an engineer specializing in gas chambers and executions. He is well versed in all areas and is the only consultant in the United States that I know of."[\[2\]](#)

Zündel's attorneys confirmed the fact that Leuchter had worked as a consultant in the manufacture and use of execution equipment for a period of nine years and was the only qualified expert in this field in the United States.

When later asked to explain why he decided to undertake this assignment, Leuchter stated,

"I testified in Canada for two reasons: First, the trial was an issue of freedom of speech and freedom of belief. As an American, one who supports the Bill of Rights, I believe that Mr. Zündel has the right to believe and say what he chooses. I have this right in the United States. Secondly, Mr. Zündel was not on trial for a misdemeanor. This was a major felony. He could have faced up to 25 years [sic] in prison for printing a document stating that there were no gas chambers at Auschwitz. I believe that any man, no matter what he had done, has a right to a fair trial, and the best possible defense that he can muster. I, unfortunately, was the only expert in the world who could provide that defense. There was no one else."[\[3\]](#)

In spite of the malicious claims of his detractors, Fred Leuchter's professional credentials were impeccable and his expertise has been repeatedly confirmed by reputable sources such as *The Atlantic Monthly*, (Feb. 1990), referring to Fred Leuchter as

"the nation's only commercial supplier of execution equipment...A trained and accomplished engineer, he is versed in all types of execution equipment. He makes lethal-injection machines, gas chambers, and gallows, as well as electrocution systems..."

A five-page article in the *New York Times* (October 13, 1990), described Leuchter as *"The nation's leading adviser on capital punishment."*

In his book *America's Capital Punishment Industry*, film director and author Stephen Trombley confirms the fact that Fred Leuchter is

"America's first and foremost supplier of execution hardware. His products include electric chairs, gas chambers, gallows, and lethal injection machines. He offers design, construction, installation, staff training and maintenance."[\[4\]](#)

In fact, Fred Leuchter had also designed and built the first electronic sextant and developed a unique, compact and inexpensive optical drum sector encoder for use with surveying and measuring instruments. He designed and worked on astro trackers utilized in the on-board guidance systems of ICBMs and was trained in reading and interpreting aerial photographs. Leuchter also held a research medical license from both state and federal governments, and had supplied the necessary drugs for use in execution support programs.

Despite, or perhaps because of, his accomplishments, Leuchter was targeted for public vilification, stigmatized, driven from his home, divested of his property and denied his fundamental right to "life, liberty and pursuit of happiness." In fact, no American in recent memory has been as vilified as Fred Leuchter, simply due to the reason that, upon completing his investigation of the alleged homicidal gas chambers at Auschwitz, he concluded that the facilities could not possibly have been used as homicidal gas chambers.

Leuchter submitted samples taken from the alleged gas chambers at Auschwitz, Birkenau and Majdanek to Alpha Analytical Laboratories, a top forensic laboratory in Massachusetts in order to test them for cyanide residues. The samples were analyzed to determine the total iron and total cyanide content. Each sample received an identification number. The results of the tests were startling, in that they revealed little or no actual presence of cyanide compounds in most of the samples submitted.

After receiving the results of the test, Leuchter prepared a monograph, thereafter known as the *Leuchter Report*, combining his personal knowledge of gas chamber facilities and their operation in the United States with the information he had garnered from his onsite inspection of Auschwitz, Birkenau, and Majdanek.

In Leuchter's professional view, the facilities allegedly used to gas over one million people at Auschwitz were crude, inefficient, rudimentary and unsafe.

Leuchter's conclusions were later confirmed by a number of independent researchers, such as professional engineer Walter Lüftl of Austria and Germar Rudolf, formerly associated with the prestigious Max Planck Institute in Germany.

Dr. William B. Lindsey, a retired American chemist who was employed for 33 years by the DuPont Corporation, actually anticipated Leuchter's testimony in the first Zündel trial in 1985. Based upon his own investigation of the site at Auschwitz, Lindsey declared under oath:

"I have come to the conclusion that no one was willfully or purposefully killed with Zyklon B in this manner. I consider it absolutely impossible."[\[5\]](#)

A subsequent examination conducted by the Krakow Forensic Institute on behalf of the Auschwitz Main Museum undertaken in September 1990, paralleled the findings contained in the *Leuchter Report*. This fact is especially pertinent since their report was ostensibly undertaken to refute Leuchter's conclusions.

With the Zündel trial behind him, Leuchter's first thought was to return to his normal profession and carry on business as usual. Unbeknownst to Leuchter, his life was to be changed forever. Leuchter's 'indiscretion' had set into motion powerful forces determined to discredit not only his conclusions regarding Auschwitz, but to discredit the man himself and ruin his life.

Fred Leuchter later remarked:

"Because I was somewhat naive at the time, I was not aware that by so testifying I was offending the organized world Jewish community. By providing final, definitive proof that there were no execution gas chambers utilized for genocidal purposes by the Germans at these wartime camps, I established the simple fact that the Holocaust story is not true. What I did not know was that anyone expressing such beliefs is guilty of a capital crime: that of thinking and telling the unspeakable truth about the greatest lie of the age.

"I would have to pay for this crime. While I innocently told the truth in Toronto, plans were made, and subsequently implemented, for a major effort to destroy me. If I could be destroyed and discredited – so the reasoning went – no one would accept my professional findings, no matter how truthful."[\[6\]](#)

Leuchter's apprehensions proved to be well-founded over time. As details of these behind-the-scenes machinations slowly emerged, Leuchter discovered that:

"...An insidious plot was being fomented by various Jewish groups, mainly the Holocaust Survivors and Friends in Pursuit of Justice, headed by Shelly Shapiro and based in Latham, New York, and its parent organization, the Beate Klarsfeld Foundation, headed by Beate Klarsfeld and based in Paris. Additionally, the Anti-Defamation League of the B'nai B'rith joined, forming a rather unholy and anti-American trinity."[\[7\]](#)

The Klarsfeld Foundation solicited the talents of French pharmacist Jean-Claude Pressac in an attempt to controvert the information contained in the *Leuchter Report*. The foundation provided funding and opened all necessary doors to assist and support Pressac's assignment - doors which are routinely closed to revisionist researchers.

To his utter dismay, Leuchter uncovered a web of deceit and subversion which was intended to permanently destroy his life and career. The methods used by Leuchter's detractors was five-pronged:

1. Political threats to prison officials with whom Leuchter conducted business
2. Vilification by private contacts and in the television and newspapers

3. Work behind the scenes to push for legislation to prevent Leuchter from practicing his profession
4. Incitement to prosecute Leuchter for attempting to practice his profession
5. Dissemination of malicious gossip, smears and character assassination, both openly and privately.

Sometime in late 1988, Jewish organizations began contacting prison officials and other Department of Corrections officials in states where capital punishment was still mandated by law. Their objective was to put Leuchter out of business and besmirch his character. Veiled threats of a political nature were made to prison officials should they unwisely opt to sign a business contract with Leuchter in the future.

Leuchter described these well-orchestrated attempts to destroy him as follows:

“I have been vilified both privately and publicly in all forms of the media. My clients have been cajoled and threatened into not dealing with me. High-level law enforcement officials, acting for personal reasons, have lied about me and have prevented clients from dealing with me. My person and reputation have been defiled by lies and innuendo. My family and I have been repeatedly threatened.”

“Behind this campaign to punish me and suppress the truth about the gas chambers, have been several Jewish organizations, which have publicly vowed to silence me by destroying my ability to make a living.”

“I was charged with practicing as an engineer without a license. In point of fact, a license is not required in Massachusetts, or any other state, unless the engineer is involved in construction of buildings, and is certifying compliance with specifications. There is also a statutory exemption for engineers who do not deal with the general public...Owing to the successful conspiracy of these Jewish groups, I am completely out of business, unable to find work to feed my family. In spite of everything, though, I am still here, and I am still telling the truth. Furthermore, I intend to continue to tell the truth. If the organized Jewish community wants to stop me, it will have to try much harder.”[\[8\]](#)

Leuchter attempted to carry on business as usual, but noticed a definite decline in new contracts. In 1990, Leuchter was contacted by a writer working for *Atlantic* magazine. The reporter asked for Leuchter’s input with respect to execution equipment in the United States and Leuchter’s efforts to make executions more humane by replacing antiquated equipment with modern equipment. No mention was made at the time of either the Zündel trial or the *Leuchter Report*, but shortly after the article was published, irate complaints began to pour in, primarily from the Jewish community.

As a result of this article, Leuchter was asked to appear on *Prime Time Live* ABC News. At the time of the interview, Leuchter was informed by personnel at ABC News that prison officials at locations where the interview was taped had been contacted and threatened with political consequences if the interview was allowed to continue.

Shortly thereafter, ABC News received similar threats, but to their credit, they refused to back down, and even went so far as to inform Leuchter that these groups were determined to interfere with his livelihood as an engineer.

The smear campaign took its toll as increasing numbers of prison officials refused to conduct business with Leuchter. Prison officials no longer answered his telephone calls, and old friends became ominously silent whenever the subject of conducting previous business as usual was raised.

There were international repercussions as well.

When Leuchter attempted to speak at public meetings in Germany and Great Britain, he was detained and arrested. Held under "investigative detention" in Germany for several weeks,^[9] he and his wife were also harassed and detained in Great Britain in an attempt to deprive him of his right to speak his opinion relative to homicidal gas chambers in Auschwitz and Birkenau.

Unable to bear the public humiliation and notoriety any longer, Leuchter's wife Carolyn, despondent and ill, subsequently filed for divorce and left him.

To Leuchter's utter consternation, he discovered that legislation had been introduced that was specifically designed to put him out of business for good in the State of Massachusetts. The primary individual responsible for the legislation, Eric Redock, appeared on television as a representative of Amnesty International, and used the occasion to launch an attack upon Fred Leuchter, avowing that it was his intention as well as of those whom he represents, to "put Fred Leuchter out of business."^[10]

In perhaps the most devious development connected with this sordid affair, Leuchter was invited to appear on Channel 2 Boston, ostensibly to "discuss inadequate execution equipment in use across America." Thoroughly hoodwinked, Leuchter agreed to appear on the program, having been led to believe that the request was legitimate and innocuous, only to be confronted on the air at the last moment with Shelly Shapiro and Beate Klarsfeld, who proceeded to smear Mr. Leuchter as a "Nazi." Leuchter was not given an opportunity to reply to his detractors.

Shortly after this televised episode, Leuchter was contacted by the Engineering Board of the State of Massachusetts following a formal complaint filed by Shelly Shapiro's Holocaust Survivors and Friends in Pursuit of Justice, organization. Details of the complaint were withheld from Leuchter until such time as the matter was resolved in court, but the board added ominously that Leuchter would have to cease practicing his profession in the State of Massachusetts or face criminal charges.

Leuchter appeared in court and attempted to have the complaint thrown out as malicious prosecution, but when the clerk received word that the complaint had been filed by the Holocaust Survivors and Friends of Justice organization, the matter was handed over to a judge. Ultimately, Leuchter was legally proscribed from ever practicing his profession in the State of Massachusetts, where he resides.

In the meanwhile, Leuchter continued to suffer a devastating loss of business throughout the United States, as contracts were broken under various pretexts.

Ed Carnes, former assistant Attorney General for the State of Alabama, generated a memorandum which he sent to all capital-punishment states warning that Leuchter was dangerous and should not be dealt with because he held "unorthodox" views on executions. Carnes portrayed Leuchter as an avaricious con-man. Since Leuchter's views on executions in the United States were widely known to be humane, it only seems reasonable to suggest that Carnes could only have been alluding to Leuchter's "unorthodox" views regarding the alleged executions at Auschwitz-Birkenau.

In Illinois, Representative Ellis Levin (D), Chicago, averred that to allow Leuchter to continue working for the state “would be an affront to the Jewish community.”^[11] Mr. Levin failed to explain the correlation between the Jewish community and the execution of condemned criminals in America or how Leuchter’s recognized expertise in this field should negatively impact the Jewish community. In fact, Leuchter later posited that their interference in his right to pursue his profession resulted in a number of botched executions due to antiquated execution machinery.

The *Chicago Sun-Times* newspaper chimed in with the rising criticism directed at Mr. Leuchter and remarked that “the state [of Illinois] cut its ties with him over statements that Nazi gas chambers, including those at Auschwitz, could not have been used for executing Jews.”^[12]

Chi niente sa, di niente dubita. (Who knows nothing, doubts nothing -Ed.)

They too, failed to provide a convincing explanation as to why Leuchter’s published conclusions with respect to Auschwitz were erroneous or somehow disqualify him from practicing his profession in the United States.

The general consensus of the media seemed to be: Never mind whether *The Leuchter Report* is accurate; he wrote it, therefore he must be punished.

Such reactions to *The Leuchter Report* underscore the irrational nature of the attack upon its author. Instead of focusing attention upon the technological and scientific evidence contained in the report, hostile critics pressed for their pound of flesh; as if it were better that no Jews at all had survived the Holocaust, - evincing an incomprehensible desire to seek or perpetuate a belief that millions perished even if they didn’t.

Accentuating their role in the ruination of Leuchter’s career, the Klarsfeld Foundation and the Holocaust Survivors and Friends in Pursuit of Justice organization subsequently published a book entitled, *Truth Prevails: Demolishing Holocaust Denial: The End of the Leuchter Report.*^[13]

The title was pretentious and absurd, and focused far too much energy in attempting to personally discredit the man responsible for writing it by means of character assassination. Beate Klarsfeld, in her self-appointed role as *Censor deputatus*, perhaps best summed up the intention which prompted the publication when she remarked that Leuchter “has to understand that in denying the Holocaust, he cannot remain unpunished.”^[14]

Leuchter Becomes “Mr. Death”

In 1998, Fred Leuchter was contacted by film director Errol Morris, who expressed his interest in filming his story, allowing Leuchter an opportunity to respond to his detractors, which he did in the following terms:

“Of course I’m not an anti-Semite. I have a lot of friends that are Jewish. I’ve lost Jewish friends, too, because of what’s happened. I bear no ill will to any Jews any place, whether they’re in the United States or abroad. I bear a great deal of ill will to those people that have come after me, those people who have persecuted and prosecuted me, but that’s got nothing to do with them being Jewish. That only has to do with the fact that they’ve been interfering with my right to live, think, breathe, and earn a living.... They’ve expressed their unquestioned intent of destroying me simply because I testified in Canada, not

because I have any other affiliation with any anti-Semitic organization, not because I'm affiliated with any Nazi or neo-Nazi organization."

When, toward the end of the film, Morris asks Leuchter, "Have you ever thought that you might be wrong, or do you think that you could make a mistake,?" Leuchter replies:

"No, I'm past that. When I attempted to turn those facilities into gas execution facilities and was unable to, I made a decision at that point that I wasn't wrong. And perhaps that's why I did it. At least it cleared my mind, so I know that I left no stone unturned. I did everything possible to substantiate and prove the existence of the gas chambers, and I was unable to."

Morris was later accused of re-editing the film after it received positive reviews at the Sundance Film Festival. In a review of the film, Greg Raven of the Institute for Historical Review, wrote:

"Leuchter comes across just as straightforward and guileless on film as he is in real life. As a result, some viewers of earlier versions at the Sundance Festival, the Toronto Film Festival and Harvard University began to question the Holocaust extermination stories they'd been told, while others suspected that Morris himself might have been converted to Holocaust revisionism. At the eleventh hour, Morris re-edited the film in an effort to emphasize his anti-revisionist point of view. Character assassination aside, the question remains as to whether or not Leuchter's findings regarding the alleged Nazi gas chambers at Auschwitz and Birkenau are correct." [\[15\]](#)

In a terse critique of Morris's film, Robert Faurisson commented:

"Fred Leuchter is described in words as a sort of technician of death administered in four ways: electrocution, hanging, lethal injection, and gassing. But while Morris takes care to illustrate the first three methods of execution with numerous images, he carefully avoids showing even one image of an American penitentiary gas chamber. And he is right to do so, for the mere representation of the imposing door of such a chamber would...be enough to let the attentive viewer grasp that the putting to death of one man by gassing with hydrocyanic acid calls for extensive safety measures and a highly sophisticated technique." [\[16\]](#)

The orchestrated campaign to destroy Fred Leuchter was successful.

Libeled, slandered, deprived of his livelihood, his marriage in shambles, the man who was recognized as the foremost American expert on the design and functioning of gas chambers and execution hardware used in the United States; the man confirmed by the warden of the Missouri State Penitentiary, who testified under oath that he had consulted with Leuchter in the design, maintenance and operation of the Missouri gas chamber; the man who "to the best of his knowledge, was the only such consultant in the United States... ..now works as a bus driver.

Bowed, but not broken, Fred Leuchter remains optimistically confident that *The Leuchter Report* will stand the test of time and that truth will ultimately prevail. In the words of Fred Leuchter,

"I have been vilified by the caretakers of the Holocaust dogma whose desperate tactics prove the failure of their arguments. My livelihood has been destroyed, my character has been impugned and my life turned upside down. But I will not bend the knee. Not now, not tomorrow, not ever. Time and reason will vindicate The Leuchter Report." [\[17\]](#)

Notes:

- [1] "Arsonists Devastate Revisionist Publisher: Thoughtcrime 07/04/84."
Online: [node/307](#) See also the *IHR Newsletter* October 1984, No. 28.
- [2] Barbara Kulaszka, *Did Six Million Really Die? – Report of the Evidence in the Canadian “False News” Trial of Ernst Zündel– 1988*, (Toronto: Samisdad Pub. Ltd., 1992), p. 502.
- [3] Greg Raven, “Flawed Documentary of Execution Expert,” *Journal of Historical Review* Vol. 18, No. 5/6, September/December 1999, p. 63.
Online: http://www.ihr.org/jhr/v18/v18n5p62_Raven.html
- [4] Mark Weber, “Probing Look at Capital Punishment Industry Affirms Expertise of Auschwitz Investigator Leuchter,” *Journal of Historical Review* Vol. 17, No. 2, March / April 1998, pp. 34ff. See also, Stephen Trombley, *The Execution Protocol: Inside America's Capital Punishment Industry*, (New York: Anchor Books, 1992).
- [5] *The Globe and Mail*, Toronto, Feb. 12, 1985, p. M3.
- [6] Fred A. Leuchter, Jr., “Is there Life after Persecution? – The Botched Execution of Fred Leuchter,” presented at the eleventh IHR Conference, 1992. *Journal of Historical Review* Vol. 12, No. 4, Winter, 1992-93, pp. 429-444.
Online: <http://www.vho.org/GB/Journals/JHR/12/4/Leuchter429-444.html>
- [7] Fred A. Leuchter, Jr., “Witch Hunt in Boston,” *Journal of Historical Review*, Vol. 10, No. 4, Winter 1990-91, pp. 453-460.
Online: http://www.ihr.org/jhr/v10/v10p453_Leuchter.html
- [8] “Germans Want to Try Leuchter - If He Would Only Let Them,” *The Week in Germany*, 23 September 1994.
Online: <http://www.fpp.co.uk/Auschwitz/Leuchter/WeekinGermany230994.html>
- [9] Leuchter, “Is There Life after Persecution?,” *op cit.*, pp. 430-33.
- [10] Leuchter, “Witch Hunt in Boston,” *op.cit.*, p. 74.
- [11] *Chicago Daily Law Bulletin*, August 17, 1990.
- [12] Mark Weber, “Fred Leuchter: Courageous Defender of the Truth,” *Journal of Historical Review* Vol. 12, No. 4, Winter, 1992-93, p. 423.
Online: http://www.ihr.org/jhr/v12/v12p421_Weber.html
- [13] Shelly Shapiro, ed., *Truth Prevails: Demolishing Holocaust Denial: The End of the Leuchter Report*, (New York: The Beate Klarsfeld Foundation, and Holocaust Survivors and Friends in Pursuit of Justice, 1990), p. 11.

- [14] Jewish Telegraphic Agency dispatch, *Detroit Jewish News*, March 1, 1991.
- [15] Greg Raven, *op. cit.*.
- [16] Robert Faurisson, "Mr. Death," Letters to the Editor, *Journal for Historical Review* Vol. 19, No. 6, November/ December 2000, p. 55.
- [17] Mark Weber "Courageous Defender of Historical Truth," *op. cit.*, p. 428.

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